



**Testimony of
Danielle Ewen
Director, Child Care and Early Education**

**Early Learning Stakeholders Meeting
U.S. Department of Education
January 29, 2010**

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the potential of the upcoming reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) to expand high quality early childhood programs for children from birth through the age of school entry. ESEA reauthorization represents an opportunity to build on the Administration's leadership in child care and early education to create a system of care that increases access to high quality settings for low-income children and their families. It also provides an opportunity to combine the place-based approach of the Administration with innovative and workable models of high quality full-day and year early childhood education programs.

CLASP has spent several years examining how Title I of ESEA funds are used to support early childhood programs at the local level, and analyzing opportunities for improvement, expansion, and coordination at the federal, state, and local levels. As a result of this work, we have collected information on more than 100 programs in local school districts and have conducted interviews with more than half of those to understand the barriers and flexibility in the law. Our initial findings were reported in *Missed Opportunities: The Possibilities and Challenges of Funding High-Quality Preschool through Title I of the No Child Left Behind Act* (http://www.clasp.org/publications/missed_opp.pdf) and in *Title I and Early Childhood Programs: A Look at Investments in the NCLB Era* (<http://www.clasp.org/admin/site/publications/files/0379.pdf>).

This work has helped us define three principles to consider for early childhood issues in reauthorization of ESEA:

- 1. *Coordinated systems development.*** Ensure that investments through ESEA in early childhood at the state and local level are part of the comprehensive and coordinated planning for birth to eight systems that are being funded and developed through federal, state and private efforts across the country. ESEA funded programs should work with other funding streams, including child care, Head Start, early intervention, state pre-kindergarten and the proposed Early Learning Challenge Fund to expand, not duplicate,

the availability of high quality early childhood programs. In addition, the reauthorization should help blend the birth to five approach of successful early childhood programs with early elementary programs in service delivery and design, professional development, and engagement of families and communities.

2. ***Expand high quality early childhood opportunities.*** Develop and expand local early childhood programs through ESEA that meet standards of program quality, provide comprehensive services and supports, and meet the full-day and year needs of working families with children from birth through the age of school entry.
3. ***Link education reform efforts to young children.*** Use ESEA to promote appropriate investments and place a priority on services for young children in all areas of education reform (and throughout all Titles of ESEA), including teacher quality and professional development efforts, programs serving children who are English Language Learners, children with special needs, children in the child welfare system and those who are currently homeless.

To promote these principles, CLASP has identified several areas to explore in reauthorization:

- Improve data collection;
- Revise the population factor in the Title I formulae to include young children;
- Enhance language on transitions between community-based early childhood programs and local schools;
- Sustain and support local flexibility in use of funds for discretionary purposes, such as early childhood programs;
- Ensure joint professional development opportunities are available to build knowledge of child development and appropriate practices, including working with English Language Learners and other special populations;
- Encourage state educational agencies to promote early childhood programs at the local level; and
- Continue to increase funding.

Improve data collection.

Little is known about the total amount of ESEA funds spent on early education services, or what those funds provide to children. In 2000, GAO found that most children served with Title I funds were between three and five years old, with less than 1 percent of them below the age of three. Of the school districts that served early education children with Title I funds, over 90 percent established a minimum eligibility age of three or four. Less than 20 percent of all school districts that received Title I funds chose to use these funds for early education; of those, most used less than 10 percent of their total Title I funds for this purpose.¹ Districts do not report their Title I expenditures on early education to the U.S. Department of Education, and the National Center for Education Statistics, which provides annual reports on children in early education, does not report data by funding stream. A number of studies cite Title I as a federal funding source for early education, or suggest Title I as a potential source, but these reports do not provide data on how many children are served, what services are provided with the funds, or the settings in which the funds are used.² For example, a survey in Washington State found that 29 percent of

preschool programs were at least partially funded through Title I.³ The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) compiles a yearly report on the status of public early education in the states. The NIEER *Yearbook* notes the difficulty of adequately reporting on Title I funds for early education because many states do not require tracking of the funds at the local level. While NIEER found that 12 of the 50 programs surveyed did use Title I funds, few states reported the amount of Title I funds allocated to early education.⁴

Nationally, available data from the U.S. Department of Education suggests that only 3 percent of children receiving Title I-funded services, or nearly 456,500 children, are younger than the age of school entry.⁵ This percentage appears to be largely unchanged over time. However, when analyzing the data on the number of children served with Title I funds, it is important to remember that, according to GAO, “[t]hese services include educational and medical services and social services.... [B]ecause services were funded with both Title I and non-Title I funds, it is difficult to determine the extent to which Title I funds supported specific services.”⁶ In other words, while there are estimates of the numbers of children served with these funds, the nature of Title I services and the opportunity these funds provide to supplement other funding sources means that this not an unduplicated count and many of these children may also be reported in other funding streams.

CLASP recommends that the reauthorization include language requiring local educational agencies (LEAs) to report on: 1) the number of children served by age, for all children before age of kindergarten entry; 2) a description of the program and/or services received by children in these age groups; and 3) total expenditures for this age group.

Revise the population factor in the formulae to include young children.

While the data suggest that only 3 percent of children served are below the age of school entry, recent investments in early childhood programs at the local level show that there is significant interest in these types of programs. Unfortunately, many school districts are unable to invest in a population of children for whom they receive no funding; revising the four formulae in the ESEA legislation to include at least those children who are three and four years of age and could participate in pre-kindergarten programs will both send a strong signal to LEAs that younger children are part of their eligible population and potentially provide resources for coordinated services to these children.

CLASP recommends that the reauthorization revise the population factor used in the four formulae to include children from birth through age of mandatory school entry; if this does not prove feasible, the formulae should at a minimum include three- and four-year-old children.

Enhance language on the role of local schools in improving transitions between community-based early childhood programs and schools.

The current language in ESEA is quite clear that LEAs must work with Head Start, state preschools, Early Reading First and other early education programs to coordinate and transition children between these settings and schools (see, for instance, sec. 1112, 1114, 1115, 1120b). However, the role of the local school in these transition activities is vague at best.

Language in the 2007 Head Start reauthorization law required local Head Start agencies to work with individual schools on transition and coordination. This puts an enormous burden on these Head Start agencies to take the lead role in building relationships with schools.

CLASP recommends that the reauthorization include language (similar to that in the Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act) that requires local schools to work with local Head Start agencies, as well as other child care and early education programs serving young children in their catchment area, to ensure that effective transition policies and practices are in place.

Sustain and support local flexibility in use of funds for discretionary purposes, such as early childhood programs.

ESEA may place two interests in direct competition for funding: the desire of schools and districts to invest in young children early in their learning careers to achieve long-term gains in closing the achievement gap versus the short-term need to raise scores at third grade and the need for immediate interventions in first, second, and third grade. Schools that are identified for school improvement status may need to redirect resources to concentrate on the primary grades and to meet set-aside and spending requirements, which may cause the overall amount of Title I funds available for preschool to diminish over time.

As schools and LEAs move into improvement status, their flexibility is substantially limited. If a school is found to be in need of improvement, the LEA in which the school is located must set aside an amount equal to 20 percent of its Title I allocation to fund supplemental educational services and transportation for students who wish to transfer to other schools. If demand for these services is less than this amount, the school can spend the remainder on other services or carry over the set-aside amount to the next year. An additional 10 percent, at a minimum, must be set aside for professional development.

In many cases, these funds may already be allocated to services and programs that are meeting the long term goals of the school or LEA and there are no extra funds to set-aside. As a result, some school districts have been forced to discontinue investments in early childhood programs in order to meet the set-aside requirements. For example, in 2006, Peabody Public Schools in Massachusetts were forced to eliminate their 30-year old Title I preschool as a result of 1) an overall reduction in their Title I allocation and 2) an elementary school moving into school improvement status. Once Peabody met their funding obligations to the elementary school and to the set-aside requirements,⁷ there were not sufficient funds left over to fund the preschool programs and they were eliminated. When this happens, there may not be sufficient early childhood space in the surrounding community to provide these services, and children who would benefit from high quality early childhood services may not have access to those programs.

CLASP recommends that LEAs or schools identified for improvement that have previously invested in early childhood programs be encouraged to sustain those investments through incentives such as a lower set-aside requirement for supplemental educational services and transportation. Alternatively, the SEA four percent set-aside for schools in improvement could be used to help LEAs and schools maintain investments in early childhood programs.

Ensure joint professional development opportunities are available to build knowledge of child development and appropriate practices, including working with English Language Learners and other special populations.

Professional development is a priority within ESEA. And, well-trained and educated teachers are a key component of high quality early childhood programs. According to research from the Department of Health and Human Services and others, knowledge of child development is a key component of quality interactions in early childhood settings.⁸ Yet ESEA only makes mention of the importance of learning about child development in the context of the National Teacher Recruitment Campaign.

Further the growth of young children from immigrant families—according to the 2000 U.S. Census, children in immigrant families are the fastest growing segment of the nation’s child population⁹--suggests that there needs to be a priority on training for teachers working with these young children, many of whom are English Language Learners, or children who are learning English as their second language. Title III includes provisions to build the professional development opportunities for teachers working with limited English proficient (LEP) children; however, the focus of these efforts seems to be on children in the K-12 school population.

Finally, as more LEAs invest Title I and other funds in early childhood programs, and more community-based programs partner with Head Start and schools to serve young children at-risk of school failure, it is important to the success of school readiness initiatives that all teachers—whether in the schools or in community-based child care and early education programs—have the opportunity to participate in targeted professional development around child development and appropriate early childhood practices.

CLASP recommends that language be inserted in Title II that supports the development of state and local professional development opportunities for school-based teachers and community-based providers working with Title I eligible children to gain knowledge of child development and learning (including cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development and approaches to learning), as well as appropriate practices for working with English Language Learners and other special populations, of children birth through age eight and developmentally appropriate practices to support children’s positive development and learning.

Encourage state educational agencies to promote early childhood programs at the local level.

One of the findings of the research CLASP has done is that many LEAs may not be aware of the flexibility of the Title I funds and the ability they have to use these funds to invest in early childhood programs within schools and within their communities. While the Department of Education published non-regulatory guidance in 2004 that clearly demonstrates that this is an allowable use of the funds, the guidance has not been widely circulated to states and local districts. As the Administration moves forward with initiatives such as the State Early Childhood Advisory Councils and the proposed Early Learning Challenge Fund to promote development of high quality comprehensive and coordinated systems of early childhood education for children

birth to eight at the state level, it is important that states be provided the tools they need to help LEAs promote the goals of these new system activities to ensure that low-income children have access to the services and supports they need to thrive.

At the state level, several states have actively encouraged their LEAs to investigate whether using Title I funds to support early childhood programs meets their needs. California's First Five Commission encouraged districts at risk of failing to meet annual yearly progress (AYP) to think about growing preschool programs through the use of Title I funds. Using small planning grants and technical assistance to districts, First Five helped to increase the amount of Title I funds used across the state for this purpose— between the 2001-2002 and 2005-2006 school years, the number of districts in California reserving Title I funds for preschool climbed from 30 to 57, and the amount of Title I funds available rose 76%, to \$13.5 million.

In Washington, a new effort to promote Title I for early childhood programs has resulted in improved reporting of Title I-funded activities with young children and more technical assistance from the state agency that coordinates early learning. Louisiana provides guidance for Title I funded preschool programs that is aligned with their state pre-kindergarten program so that children and families can seamlessly access quality services.

A key feature of Title I funds is that they can be used to coordinate service delivery with local community-based early childhood services. An incentive at the state level could be used to leverage these partnerships in order to facilitate transitions at each age level and across grades birth to eight, to promote improved data collection at the local level, as well as to support intensive community planning that maps local early childhood assets and needs and helps provide resources in communities to fill gaps in the supply or quality of infant and toddler care and for children who are English Language Learners or have special needs.

CLASP recommends that state educational agencies be encouraged in legislative language and new dedicated funding to support planning grants and technical assistance to LEAs to create incentives, such as state match of local funds, support for community needs assessments and other innovative efforts to use Title I and other ESEA funds for coordinated and comprehensive early childhood programs.

Continue to increase overall funding for ESEA.

Title I funds have been increased recently, both through ARRA funds and through the base grant. This effort has let some LEAs increase their services, although in many cases the funding has only been adequate to maintain services, but not to grow new programs. CLASP has found that many school districts are anxious to increase early childhood offerings but cannot do so without significant new resources. New funding, combined with other changes to ESEA that place a new focus on early childhood programs, could support LEA investments in birth to eight programming.

CLASP recommends that ESEA be fully funded; at a minimum, this will require closing the current gap between the authorized and appropriated Title I funding amounts.

¹ U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Title I Preschool Education: More Children Served, but Gauging Effect on School Readiness Difficult*, 2000.

² See, for example, Children's Defense Fund. (2003). *Key Facts: Essential Information about Child Care, Early Education and School-Age Care, 2003 Edition*. Washington, DC: Author; Mitchell, A.W. (2001). *Education for All Young Children: The Role of States and the Federal Government in Promoting Preschool and Kindergarten*. Working Paper Series. New York: Foundation for Child Development. In a report that examined four state prekindergarten programs, the GAO notes that "All four states generally used relatively small amounts of federal funds, such as those from Title I or the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, to support their prekindergarten programs." U.S. Government Accountability Office (2004). *Prekindergarten: Four Selected States Expanded Access by Relying on Schools and Existing Providers of Early Education and Care to Provide Services*. Washington, DC: Author.

³ Speck, E. (2004). *Beyond the Mandate: An Analysis of a Survey of School District Early Learning Programs in Washington State*. Seattle, WA: Economic Opportunity Institute.

⁴ Barnett, W. Steven, et. al. (2007) *the State of Preschool 2006*. Rutgers, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research.

⁵ U.S. Department of Education, *State ESEA Title I Participation Information, 2003-2004*.

⁶ U.S. General Accounting Office, 2000.

⁷ Section 1116 (b) (10) (D) prohibits a reduction of more than 15% of its prior year allocation to a school identified for corrective action or restructuring when the district is reserving Title I funds for choice-related transportation and supplemental educational services.

⁸ Fiene, Richard (2002). *13 Indicators of Quality Child Care: Research Update*. Denver, CO: National Research Center for Health and Safety in Child Care, University of Colorado.

⁹ Hernandez, Donald. "Demographic Change and the Life Circumstances of Immigrant Families." *Future of Children*, 14(2), 17-47.